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Influence of Family Structure on Social and Emotional Loneliness among Elders

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to compare the loneliness type in nuclear and joint family system. Researcher conduct the study to test the following two hypothesis; Nuclear family system predicts more emotional loneliness in aged people dissimilar to joint family system, Nuclear family system predicts more social loneliness in elderly people contrary to joint family system. This study is based on cross-sectional research design and quantitative in nature. Researcher collected the data from 246 elder subjects by using the stratified random probability sampling technique. These subjects are living in nuclear and joint family systems of district Haripur, Pakistan. Loneliness type is measured by using the Urdu version of UCLA Loneliness Scale. Researcher analyzed the data by using the statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) software. Study results has proven the hypothesis and it was concluded that social and emotional types of loneliness is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system.

Keywords: Social Loneliness, Emotional Loneliness, Nuclear Family and Joint Family

Introduction

Individuals' life style has changed due to the rapid advancement in science and technology while on the other hand aging issues are becoming complex. Tradition of joint family system is gradually breaking down which are source of protection and security for elder people. Developing trends of nuclear family unit in this era are placing the elders in the isolation state, due to which they are facing the social, emotional, medical and psychological problems. Among these, major issues are loneliness, depression, isolation, neglect and sense of not being wanted. These modifications in family structure are compelling the senior citizens to live alone.

This study is dealing with one of the major issue of elders that is loneliness gradually prevailing in the family system. According to Donaldson and Watson (1996), loneliness is an emotional condition that arose when individual felt rejection from others or does not receive proper social company for desired activities. Loneliness may exists in all age groups but is a bigger issue for the senior elders.

Although aging is not only the one reason that cause loneliness in elders but it has been proven that there is direct relationship between age and loneliness (Baretta, Dantzler & Kayson, 1995). Loneliness exhibits mainly three characteristics: First, it is universal phenomena, secondly, it is subjective experience and finally multidimensional (Rokach, 2012).

Loneliness is of different type, Young (1982) divided the loneliness in three categories such as transient, situational and chronic. Transient loneliness is mostly brief and on everyday basis while situational loneliness mostly occur after the serious incidents like the spouse death or divorce. When individual is unable to maintain the satisfying relationship over a period of years then the individual is in the state of chronic illness. While, Weiss (1973) distinguished the loneliness into the two broader categories emotional and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness causes due to the lack of personal relationship and attachment and social loneliness exists due to absence of social relationship or sense of connectivity. Weiss believed that the most painful form of isolation is emotional loneliness as compare to social loneliness which is characterized as feeling of rejection or sense of boredom. Although loneliness is present in different forms but this study is specifically related to two broad categories of loneliness that is emotional and social loneliness.

There are different reasons of causing the loneliness such as death of beloved one, divorce (Dykstr & Gierveld, 2004), changes in social networks and in personal relationships (Peplua & Perlman, 1982), demographic features, personality traits, living arrangements and social support (Alpass & Neville, 2003). Aging is one of the issue that cause loneliness among elders. As old age is considered as the crucial period of one's life and true to some extent. Because, as man grows older, there is decline in their activities and becomes more dependent upon family members. According to World Health Organization (2014), UN has not set a standard criteria for elder citizens but usually 60+ years are taken in older population category.

Family structure play major role in overcoming the loneliness issue. According to United Nation (1948) report, family is the natural unit that have authority to provide protection and care in the state. Though family structure differ across the culture but still it is claimed that it possessed the six universal functions such as reproduction, affection and companionship, sexual behavior regulation, protection, socialization and social status (Ogburn & Tibbits, 1933). Still, it is evident that, family structure and its function changes due to urbanization, industrialization and other factors. Due to the emerging trends of modernism, the traditional system of extended family has been changed into the nuclear family. According to Parsons (1965), nuclear family is based upon the parents and their children, mostly found in modern industrial society. On the other hand, joint family system is the combination of two or more nuclear units that form the larger family (Levinson, Malone & Brown, 1980).

Family is the fundamental unit of society and its influence can be easily observed. According to Laidmae, Tammsaar, Tulva and Kasepalu (2012), elders are more comfortable and happy when living with their children. Research has also proven that elders prefer to live within their families as compare to living alone (WHO, 2011). It is the key feature of providing care to its members and based on certain values that includes collectivism, respect, cooperation etc. But as time passes, these values are being changed due to modern ideologies. One of the serious issue is facing by the elders whose desire to live with their family member, but living as alone or either in old houses. As family structure decided how much care will be provided to their elders living with them. Joint family system that is based upon two or more nuclear families are providing more care to the elders as compare to nuclear families (Berkman & Glass, 2000).

Nowadays, nuclear family system is becoming the norm in society and collectivism is being changed into individualism. People are mostly self-centered and self-fulfillment and elders are moving in the care centers or old houses. Due to communication gap between children and elders, parents has facing the issue of loneliness on a greater extent (Troll, 1982). Though diversity exists between the eastern and western culture that are effecting and contributing in the study phenomena in different way. Therefore in

study subject matter root causes of loneliness in elderly people have variation in its emergence nature. Culture background does has influence on the loneliness issue and Triandis (1989) reported that elders wish to live with their children is higher in collectivist culture as compare to individualistic culture.

Elders' population is increasing gradually and majority of world population is living in Asia, where attention should be required. Modernization brought changes in family structure that ultimately affect the care and support of elders. Pakistani culture is rich in values including social, ethical and religious beliefs. Pakistan possesses multidimensional culture and family integration, style of dressing and language promotion are on the top. But, unfortunately, these values are changing rapidly due to the passage of time. Specifically the family integration is becoming the victim of this change. Urbanization would lead to nucleation of family systems in developing countries and a decrease in the support of the elderly. A companion paper has suggested that more and more people were adopting the nuclear family system in Karachi (Mason, 1992; Bongaarts, 2001).

Significance of Study

This study gives insight about the aging problem of the elders in nuclear family system. Scope of this study is vast. By using the findings of this study practical steps are taken by the psychologist to reduce the level of social and emotional loneliness. This study give knowledge to common people that how their neglected behavior involves in increasing the level of social and emotional loneliness in old age. Study help in increasing the awareness about the loneliness issue. And help the psychologist to utilize research findings to overcome the feeling of loneliness in nuclear unit.

Literature Review

The literature review provide extensive review and insight about the present study related to comparison of loneliness type among nuclear and joint family system.

In Malaysia study was conducted to find out the factors that play major role in causing the loneliness among elder persons. Study findings has concluded that factors such as age, marital status, level of education, income and health status are directly associated with loneliness (Teh, Tey and Ng, 2014). Further, another study was designed by Sahar and Gillani (2014) to determine loneliness and depression among wives whose husbands are living out of country, by using the differential Loneliness Scale (DLS) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). Findings shows significant results and revealed that loneliness level was high in women living in nuclear family system as compared to those living in joint family system.

A study was conducted to find out the role of social support from family in decreasing the loneliness. Study results confirmed that social support receiving from family members was a negative predictor of loneliness in an adults having age 57-85 years (Shiovitz-Ezra and Leitsch, 2010). It means that social support is necessary to decrease the ratio of loneliness among elders. Similarly a qualitative study was conducted to explore their relationship between family and friends as well as nursing staff. All participants expressed that due to lack of connection with family members and friends, they have feelings of loneliness and sadness (Dahle, 2009).

Itrat, Taqui, Qazi and Qidwai (2007) study assessed the level of satisfaction among elderly living in joint family system and nuclear family system. It was observed that adults living in joint family structure are more satisfied with their lives. The major reason behind their satisfaction is the general support they receive everyday from their family. The support includes all the three aspects that are emotional, financial and social. Similarly, Mansfield and Gill (2007), found the result in study that social support was correlated inversely with loneliness. When elders live with their family members in joint family systems they receive more social support as compare to nuclear family system hence level of loneliness will be low in joint family system.

Research Methodology

Research Design

It is comparative study and based on cross-sectional research design. This study is quantitative in nature and survey technique is used to compare the level of social and emotional loneliness in nuclear and joint family system.

Objectives

This study primarily deals with one objective:
To evaluate the effect of loneliness type in nuclear and joint family systems.

Hypothesis

H1: Nuclear family system predicts more emotional loneliness in aged people dissimilar to joint family system.

H2: Nuclear family system predicts more social loneliness in elderly people contrary to joint family system.

Target Population & Sample

Target population of research study consisted of old age adults residing within the joint and nuclear family system of District Haripur KPK. Sample size is 246 which is determined through using the formula for manipulating the sample size. There are 44 union counsels in district Haripur. Each counsel is considered as one stratum and approximately 5 participants are taken from each counsel by using the stratified random probability sampling technique.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Age of participant should be 50 or greater
- Able to speak Urdu or English.
- Subjects either living in nuclear or joint family system

Exclusion Criteria

- Age of participant less than 50
- Cannot speak Urdu or English
- Subjects living in the care centers or old age homes are not taken

Variables

Family structure (nuclear & joint) are independent variable of study while loneliness level is dependent variable of study.

Research Instrument

Researcher used the translated version of UCLA Loneliness Scale version 3 for measuring the loneliness. Scale was translated by Nighat Gul in 2015. It consists of 20 items and was designed to determine loneliness among the larger group of respondents including elder adults. Gul (2015) reported that Alpha Reliability of the translated version of scale is .990 which is higher and also has comparability with the original scale version reliability.

Procedure

For conducting the research, permission from author of scale is taken and researcher collected the data through visiting the nuclear and joint family systems. Before administering a scale would create a good rapport with participants. Provide necessary information about research to participants. Scale is personally administered by the researcher. After data collection, researcher by using the SPSS software would organize and interpret it.

Study Findings

The collected data is analyzed in order to make it easy for evaluation. Before interpretation data is first organized and managed by the researcher. Raw data is converted into sequence wise and make judgment about the data as case wise or item wise. Final stage is data entry and labels the variable. Give numerical values to the variables for identification in data analysis through SPSS. On the base of outcome of entered data researcher interpret the study phenomena by using the descriptive statistics and prove or disapprove the current study hypothesis that is relevant to the level of loneliness type in nuclear and joint family system.

Reliability of UCLA Loneliness scale Items

Alpha reliability coefficients is calculated to determine the internal consistency of UCLA Loneliness scale.

Table 1

Alpha Reliability Coefficients of UCLA Loneliness Scale items for N (20)

Source	N	α
Loneliness	246	.83

Note: N =Item no, α=Alpha coefficient α = .906

Table 1 describes that the alpha coefficient for UCLA Loneliness scale 20 items is .906 which indicates that the scale items consistently measuring the acquired subject matter loneliness. Consequently these are highly reliable for measuring the loneliness. This value also matches with the Urdu version of UCLA and English version of UCLA scale that is .990 and .91. Result indicates this is the highly reliable tool / construct for measuring the study phenomenon.

Level of Social Loneliness in Nuclear and Joint Family System

In order to compare the social loneliness in nuclear and joint family system descriptive statistics and t-values are computed.

Table 2

Difference in social loneliness in both family systems

variable	Family structure								Cohen's d
	Nuclear		Joint		t(244)	p	LL	UL	
	M	SD	M	SD					
SL	21.06	6.83	13.89	6.04	8.682*	.000	5.538	8.78	1.11

*p<.001, SL= Social Loneliness

The findings of table 2 shows that mean value of social loneliness (M=21.06) is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system that is (M=13.89). Similarly the standard deviation of social loneliness (SD=6.834) is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system that is (SD=6.084). Result is significant as value of p< .001.

Comparison of Emotional Loneliness in Nuclear and Joint Family System

In order to compare the emotional loneliness in nuclear and joint family system descriptive statistics and t-values are computed.

Table 3
Difference in emotional loneliness in both family systems

Variable	Family Systems 95% C.I		t(240)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
	Nuclear	Joint					
Emotional Loneliness	M(SD) 17.04(6.462)	M(SD) 10.89(4.765)	8.490*	.000	4.720	7.572	1.08

*p<.001

The findings of table 3 shows considerable findings that mean value of emotional loneliness (M=17.04) is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system that is (M=10.89). Similarly the standard deviation of emotional loneliness (SD=6.462) is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system that is (SD=4.765). Result is significant as value of p<.001.

Relationship between the Types of Loneliness

Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficients are measured to find out the relationships between the types of loneliness.

Table 4
Pearson Product Moment Correlation between the Types of Loneliness

	r	p
Social loneliness	.800**	.000
Emotional loneliness	-	.000

**p<.001

Table 4 shows types of loneliness highly correlated with each other. It means that there is direct relationship between the types of loneliness. If one increased in an individual than automatically second one increased, when second one decreased directly first one level of loneliness declined.

Discussion

The present study has compared the level of emotional and social loneliness in nuclear and joint family system at old age. The findings of the study explained that social loneliness level is higher in nuclear family as compared to joint system of family. Similarly this study also proved that nuclear family system predicts more emotional loneliness as compare to joint family systems in elders.

First hypothesis relate that nuclear family system predicts more emotional loneliness in aged people dissimilar to joint family system. Findings reveal that aged people feel more emotional loneliness in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system. This finding is in consistent with Syed (2014) that emotional loneliness is higher in nuclear family system as compare to joint family system.

Second hypothesis affirmed that Nuclear family system predicts more social loneliness in elderly people contrary to joint family system. Findings show significant result related to the hypothesis

as value of $p < .001$. Iqbal and Akhtar (2013) also supported the research findings that old age adults residing within a joint family receive more social support in comparison with those who resides within a nuclear family unit. Great care and full support is provided to the old age adults who live with their children and grand-children. They are supported emotionally, morally, physically and socially by their children on whom they fully depend and rely on. Their children offer them security of close relationships and the opportunity of nurturance.

Limitations and Delimitations of Study

Present research has the following limitation and delimitation:

Limitations

1. This research only deals with one factor (family system) that affects the loneliness in old age. However multiple factors are involved in increasing the loneliness.
2. Area of the study is short. Data is collected from one district only and apply the findings to the research problem.
3. This research is limited to only one specific age (old age).

Delimitations

1. To overcome the short area of study, research is done on the district level not on the city level.
2. To maintain the reliability of the research data is personally collected by the researcher.
3. To make the research effective, researcher deals with the effect of family systems on level of loneliness on both male and females in old age.

Implication of Current Study

The findings of this study have great implications for improving the conditions of older adults in nuclear family structure. Results reveal the key feature that involve in increasing the level of loneliness. Research proved that nuclear family system predicts higher level of loneliness in old age. By improving the living conditions and relations with elder's level of loneliness can be minimized. Importance should be given to the traditional values and norms by keeping in touch with family members.

Future Research

Research conducted at the district level of Haripur proved that type of loneliness is lower in nuclear family system as compare to the joint family system in old age adults. It is recommended that future research should focus on a larger representative sample of older adults which would allow more definite conclusions and give precise estimates of the distribution of different network types. It would be important to explore in more detail the causes of loneliness in older adults. This could lead to a more profound understanding of the nature of loneliness, and might suggest some new means to alleviate the loneliness of older people.

The present research proved that emotional and social loneliness is higher in nuclear family system but this finding is related to only one specific age group, old age. In order to utilize the findings more research is needed also in other types of age groups. It should be likely that the nature and meaning of the concept will diverge among different groups of people. In future research, it would be interesting to not only measure the presence of feelings of loneliness but also to evaluate its perceived quality or degree of discomfort.

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